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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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A Jan. 31 poetry and music doubleheader in Putney

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Next Stage, Yellow Barn host a pair of events melding the  
genres to create something new

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TEXT BODY:

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As Yellow Barn Executive Director Catherine Stephan  
says, “we have a delightful embarrassment of riches” in Putney  
on Saturday, Jan. 31 with two separate performances that  
commingle poetry and musical performance.

At 2 p.m. that day, one can catch cellist Eugene Friesen  
and poet Court Dorsey in their collaboration, “Poems with  
Wings,” at Next Stage.

12 As Dorsey describes it, the program will be “an  
13 astonishing array of poems, from dark to light, from the absurd to  
14 the sublime — socks, cats, the creation and destruction of the  
15 world — all cradled in the loving arms of Eugene and his cello.”

16 Then, at 3 p.m., “Music & Poetry in Conversation” — the  
17 culmination of a brief residency with an ensemble of Yellow Barn  
18 alumni and Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye —  
19 takes place at Yellow Barn’s Big Barn.

20 According to a news release, the Yellow Barn program  
21 will blend “moments of reflection with bursts of playfulness,” in a  
22 collaboration that “seeks to reveal a new perspective on the  
23 emotional core of each piece — musical and poetic — through  
24 thoughtful juxtaposition.”

## 25 **‘Poems with Wings’**

26 Dorsey, a poet-playwright-actor based in Wendell,  
27 Massachusetts, “has written, acted in, or directed over 30  
28 performance ensembles,” according to a news release.

29 Offering solo performances of his original songs, poems,  
30 and short writings, he’s been a member of Pilgrim Theater  
31 Collaborative; he’s co-created with Massachusetts performing  
32 artists Jean-Claude van Itallie and Kermit Dunkelberg; and has  
33 presented at New York City’s experimental performance venue, La  
34 MaMa, among a wide range of credits and engagements.

35 Having appeared in film and in international activist  
36 theater, he was a founding member of the folk cabaret ensemble  
37 Bright Morning Star. There he toured with Pete Seeger and  
38 Odetta.

39 Friesen of Walpole, New Hampshire, is a four-time  
40 Grammy Award-winning concert and recording artist, a  
41 composer, a conductor, and a professor at Boston’s Berklee  
42 College of Music.

43 Having worked, toured, and/or recorded with Dave  
44 Brubeck, Paul Winter, Paul Simon, Martin Sexton, Dar Williams,  
45 and Will Ackerman, among others, Friesen’s “passion for

46 improvised music has been featured in concerts all over the  
47 world” a news release says, including at Cathedral of St. John the  
48 Divine in New York City, where he is an artist-in-residence.

49 Dorsey and Friesen first performed together in 2022 as  
50 part of the Mohawk Trail Concert series in Massachusetts. A  
51 reprise of sorts, Saturday’s program will feature improvised cello  
52 and poetry readings with a focus on Dorsey’s writings.

53 About the integration of text and cello, Friesen says, “I  
54 feel my whole artistic life has been influenced by working with  
55 language.”

56 Some 30 years ago, he was invited as part of the Paul  
57 Winter Consort to attend the International Poetry Festival in New  
58 Jersey, “a kind of encampment of poets from all over the world  
59 [where] I had the chance to improvise along with Galway  
60 Kinnell, Coleman Barks, Billy Collins, Robert Bly — people on  
61 the main stage of poetry at that time.”

62 “And I just found that my cello was responding to this  
63 language in ways that were surprising to me,” Friesen says.  
64 “That’s become a process of revelation for me artistically.”

65 While poems of Billy Collins and Pablo Neruda will  
66 pepper the lineup, the bulk of the poems Dorsey has chosen for  
67 Saturday come from his collection, *Tiger Stripes: Poems of*  
68 *Shadow and Light* (Human Error Publishing, 2024).

69 “It’s a set of mystical poems,” Dorsey explains. “One  
70 we’ll do, ‘Exegesis,’ is a kind of tongue-in-cheek look at what you  
71 might call ‘spiritual materialism.’”

72 He’ll read a couple of sonnets, too, from a series based  
73 on “mysteries that I came upon when I was in India many years  
74 ago, and I’ve used throughout my life.”

75 Some poems are older; others written in recent years, he  
76 says.

77 Dorsey’s poem “Light the Mechanical Man” “apologizes  
78 for the human nature of one’s own spirituality, finding itself  
79 stumbling in the streets at midnight, kind of bumping into lamp  
80 posts, etc.,” he says. “So it’s a little rangy.”

81           He also plans to read one or two poems from a series he  
82 wrote while working with a shaman in Tucson.

83           Dorsey explains that the program's "through line would  
84 be this kind of mystical thread and how that orientation survives  
85 the current climate."

86           In terms of the improvisational nature of the program,  
87 Friesen thinks that it will be spontaneous.

88           "However, as I read some of the poems in advance, I  
89 definitely have some musical ideas and vague kind of imagery  
90 that will help guide me," he says.

91           Dorsey's work, Friesen comments, "has a tremendous  
92 kind of relevancy and accessibility" with its contemporary  
93 language and imagery.

94           "The interaction between us, I think, is probably closer to  
95 jazz than anything else I can imagine," he says. "Not that the  
96 music necessarily would be jazz, but this quality of spontaneity,  
97 reacting to each other, bouncing off each other in that way."

98           And each performance will be different.

99           "Depending on Court's sense of rhythm and pacing and  
100 the spaces that he allows for the music, it will change every  
101 single time we do it, which is something that I find really  
102 engaging," Friesen says.

103           About the timeliness of this work, Dorsey says that "in  
104 hard times when things are stressful, resilience matters. And I  
105 think these poems and this magnificent music are a sustaining  
106 force."

107           He says they're "beautiful to the ear, powerful for the  
108 heart," while not denying the here and now.

109           "Part of my work is in service to the human family  
110 stumbling through the darkness," Dorsey says.

111           "And in these times when threats from [artificial  
112 intelligence] compound an already-stressed and stressful  
113 climate," Friesen adds, noting that he experiences "A.I. as kind of  
114 a big conformity machine."

115            “It draws upon things that have happened already,” he  
116 says. “What I resonate with in Court’s work is the feeling that it is  
117 really an expression of a visionary, that there is a mystical kind of  
118 vision, in the same way that you might associate some of the  
119 work of William Blake or even Allen Ginsberg.”

120            Explaining the program’s title, Dorsey says, “I’ve called  
121 this ‘Poems with Wings’ because when I read with Eugene  
122 playing, I just feel like I take flight with it.”

123            Tickets for the Next Stage performance are \$15 in  
124 advance, \$20 at the door. For more information, visit  
125 [courtdorsey.com/events](http://courtdorsey.com/events).

## 126            **More poetry, more music**

127            At Yellow Barn, a brief residency culminates on Jan. 31  
128 with a performance by Daniel Chong, violin; Jessica Bodner,  
129 viola; and Daniel Anastasio, piano, collaborating on integration  
130 of music and with the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye.

131            Interwoven with Nye’s verse will be selections from  
132 works by Eugene Ysaÿe, Dmitri Shostakovich, Maurice Ravel,  
133 Tessa Lark, Luciano Berio, Charles Ives, and Johannes Brahms.

134            Anastasio, a soloist and chamber musician based in San  
135 Antonio, Texas, is artistic director of several organizations,  
136 including his ensemble, Agarita, and the San Antonio Chamber  
137 Music Society.

138            “His programs,” a news release notes, “have included  
139 collaborations with dancers, writers, museums, photographers,  
140 glass-blowers, and more.”

141            In San Antonio, Anastasio met and first collaborated with  
142 Naomi Shihab Nye, daughter of a Palestinian refugee and an  
143 American of German and Swiss descent.

144            Having spent much of her adolescence in both Jerusalem  
145 and San Antonio, where she studied at Trinity University, Nye has  
146 received numerous honors and awards for her work, ranging from  
147 the National Book Critics Circle’s Ivan Sandrof Award for Lifetime  
148 Achievement to the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award and many

149 Pushcart Prizes. Among other honors, she's been a Guggenheim  
150 Foundation fellow and Chancellor of the Academy of American  
151 Poets.

152         Of the residency is, Anastasio notes that "if we come  
153 prepared with our own parts and we have good ears, we should  
154 be able to put it together within a day or two."

155         He and Nye, past collaborators, are "working beforehand  
156 to organize the poetry," he says, "and how it will interweave with  
157 the music."

158         Once they converge in Putney, the team with fellow  
159 collaborators, Daniel Chong, founding first violinist of the  
160 Grammy Award-winning Parker Quartet, and Jessica Bodner,  
161 founding violist of that quartet, "can just play around."

162         "That process is going to be fun," said Anastasio. "All of  
163 us will have opinions, and it'll be easy to make adjustments as  
164 needed."

165         In preparation, Nye adds, "it's such a pleasure to be  
166 listening to this music every day: thinking about the music,  
167 thinking about poems and sort of immersing in a slow way before  
168 we're all physically together."

169         He also finds it "interesting how intuitive it is, too,  
170 because when I listen to a piece a few times I start thinking 'No,  
171 no, it has to be that poem,' and I'm even writing a new poem or  
172 two to connect with some of the music."

173         It's exciting for Nye when she finds herself listening to  
174 the music and a poem "suddenly starts emerging. And because  
175 Daniel and I have done other programs together, I've seen how it  
176 works. It's really an evolution, how it comes together."

177         Anastasio stresses that for the process to work there must  
178 be trust.

179         "From the first time we worked together, it was obvious  
180 that she's incredibly trusting and that we trust each other," he  
181 says.

182         Reaching out to artists in other disciplines, Anastasio  
183 adds, especially coming from classical music, "is really important

184 [...] because we're so stuck in our own ways just by training.  
185 We're trained to move our fingers. We're trained to interpret the  
186 music at the deepest and highest levels, but not necessarily to  
187 take risks involved in embracing other modes of expression."

188 For Anastasio, "it's just jump-started a profound passion"  
189 — and that is "marrying the worlds of word and music."

190 He cites an example: "We programmed something by  
191 Maurice Ravel, 'A Boat on the Ocean,' to one of her poems,  
192 'Over the Weather.' And then that changes what was originally  
193 about a boat riding on the ocean for Ravel and all the sounds and  
194 words of that: It now becomes something that's high up in the  
195 clouds."

196 Of the experience, he says, he gets to "throw all my  
197 preconceptions of Ravel, all my classical training, out the  
198 window in terms of interpretation, and I get to be curious about  
199 what new emotional world this is generating between the  
200 combination of them."

201 That's what's so exciting for Anastasio, who describes  
202 himself as "a musician who's usually just stuck in, 'Oh, boy — I  
203 better make sure I interpret this the way that it's supposed to be  
204 interpreted.'"

205 Nye notes that the integration of words and music in the  
206 poem will be a mix: a poem may precede or follow a piece — or  
207 it may be inserted inside it.

208 With the music, she says, "the poems take on a new  
209 expansiveness. This gives them a bigger life."

210 And, she adds, "it's unpredictable: what piece will go  
211 with what poem."

212 That's because, Anastasio chimes in, "it comes  
213 fundamentally from inside the feeling of the person. [...] It's the  
214 tone, the character, the fact that music is rhetorical a lot of the  
215 time. There's questioning, there's answering, there are statements"  
216 — all too complex for the likes of A.I. to tease out.

217 Collaborator Bodner was a key force behind the  
218 residency, Anastasio notes, adding that she is “personally a big  
219 fan of Naomi.”

220 Of the event, Bodner says, “we couldn’t be more excited  
221 and grateful to bring this project to a Yellow Barn residency,”  
222 calling the opportunity “a true gift.”

223 Nye adds that she’s eager to be in Vermont again, having  
224 years ago been featured on the Vermont State Poetry Tour.

225 “It was such a magnificent experience just meeting  
226 different communities in Vermont and feeling the warmth of  
227 Vermont to the arts,” she says. “I’ve never had even a slight  
228 question about why anyone chooses to live in Vermont since that  
229 tour because it was just so loving and so beautiful.”

230 Of course, audiences can choose as they wish, but  
231 Stephan and Dorsey have no problem with folks creating a  
232 double bill of sorts: “attend half of one event and all of the other”  
233 or the other way around.

234 The two note that the “Poems with Wings” will end at  
235 3:30 and the second set at Yellow Barn will begin around 3:45.

236 Admission to the Yellow Barn is free. More program  
237 information is at [yellowbarn.org](http://yellowbarn.org). At the Big Barn following their  
238 performance, the artists will lead an open conversation with the  
239 audience.

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